

user's account stored in the account records database 10. The account can be assigned to an individual, a specific department (i.e., engineering department), a plant or building. Once the print job has been performed, the corresponding amount of tokens is withdrawn from the user's account as shown in block 310. For example, an engineer travels to another plant and needs to print out slides for a presentation. The print job requires the printing of 15 slides on transparencies and 4 pages of text. The engineer is asked to accept the charges before printing. The charges are illustrated in operation per token. After the print operation has been completed, the total charges of the printing operation are computed at the device and transmitted to the billing manager 4. The billing manager 4 transmits the information to the back office billing system software 8 which accesses the current token balance for the engineer's account. The billing system 8 then deducts the token amount for the job from the engineer's account as shown in FIG. 3, block 320 and updates the account records database 14.

The owner of the printer at which the user printed the slides and text (for example, the patent attorney, but also can be any individual, a building or a department ) is then credited the token amount corresponding to a token fee as shown in block 330. The token fee can be the entire cost of printing or a percentage thereof. The fee is determined by the billing policies of the printer device. The owner of this printer is then credited in the account records database 14 by the back office billing system software 8.

The billing system allows a user to print documents remotely. The system preferably keeps track of the accounts of the users and resolves the billing accounts on a periodic basis. The system allows users to generate a negative token balance. A negative token balance means performing more printing services than allocated by system for a predetermined time. If that is the case, then the user may need to pay for the costs of the excess printing services. The operation of the periodic token billing system is illustrated in FIG. 4. One of ordinary skill in the art can appreciate that this operation can be carried out randomly or on a routine basis. In block 400, the back office billing system software 8 determines the user accounts in the account records database 14. If the system finds no records, then the process is completed. However, if there are user account records, then the system retrieves the current token balance for every user account in the account records database 10, as shown in block 410. In block 420, the system then determines whether the current user account has a token balance less than 0. If that is the case,

then the back office billing system software 8, charges the user the determined cost/token that been configured by the system. In one embodiment, this would be carried out by the system automatically or at the prompt of an administrator. The system would print out a bill indicating the charges to the user or electronically transmit the billing information to a designated contact person as shown in block 440 or electronically debit a pre-established account. Also, the billing may indicate a specific time period for payment and other features known to billing. If the balance is not less than zero, then system ignores that account and retrieves the next users account.

The foregoing description of a preferred embodiment of the invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise form disclosed, and modifications and variations are possible in light of the above teachings or may be acquired from practice of the invention. The embodiment was chosen and described in order to explain the principles of the invention and its practical application to enable one skilled in the art to utilize the invention in various embodiments and with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated. It is intended that the scope of the invention be defined by the claims appended hereto, and their equivalents.